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THE NORTHERN LAKE FRONTIER DURING THE CIVIL WAR.

BY

J. M. CALLAHAN,  
OF JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY.

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## THE NORTHERN LAKE FRONTIER DURING THE CIVIL WAR.

By J. M. CALLAHAN.

During the period of national and industrial development which followed the war of 1812, the animosities which had been engendered between the United States and Canada were allowed to decline from lack of nourishment. In the absence of rival navies upon the lakes, and with the increase of friendly commercial intercourse, the past was partially forgotten.

Border sympathy for the Canadian insurgents in 1837-38 caused both Governments some anxiety and friction, which did not entirely disappear for several years, but after 1848 there was a renewal of mutual friendliness which continued to develop, so that in 1860, when the Prince of Wales visited America, our relations with Canada and England were probably more cordial than they had ever been before. But a political storm was already upon the horizon—an “irrepressible conflict” of such vast proportions that it would involve England and America in serious misunderstandings which it would take years to untangle.

Events growing out of the civil war several times caused the relations between the two countries to be strained almost to the breaking point. In England there was alarm felt at the vast armies and naval armaments which continued to grow as the war progressed. With the long Canadian frontier unprotected by costly forts and fleets, with a revived feeling that the United States looked forward to a “manifest destiny” of wider territory, and with thousands of Canadians joining the Union Army, it was not unnatural that England should have some fear of danger to her American possessions. This feeling was strengthened after the *Trent* affair by the statement in American papers that England would be brought to a reckoning after the close of the war.

On the other hand, there was a general feeling in the United States that the policy of the London Government was greatly

influenced by the wide sympathy for the Confederates which existed among the aristocracy and clergy of southern England, who expected to see recorded the death of another of the world's republics. The Queen had early issued a proclamation of neutrality, but the Government of Great Britain, it was said, was too fast in recognizing the cotton States as belligerents and too slow in preventing the English ports from being made bases for Confederate operations against the United States. The Times and other London papers appeared to be subservient to the Confederate cause, and some people were "persuaded that the Lord Chancellor sits on a cotton bale."

The first note of warning to England was given by Mr. Seward in a private interview with Lord Lyons in April, 1861, in which he stated that the *Peerless*, under regular British papers, was being taken from Lake Ontario by the Confederates, and that the United States could not tolerate such proceedings, no matter what flag the vessel had. Though Lord Lyons protested, Mr. Seward gave conditional directions to have the vessel seized.<sup>1</sup> In June, Mr. C. F. Adams, United States minister at London, wrote to Mr. Seward, Secretary of State, that the British were sending troops to protect Canada from invasion. Lord Russell explained that they were sent as "a mere precaution against times of trouble." He said the Americans "might do something," and he thought it well to be prepared.

By the agreement of 1817, the naval force of each party upon the lakes had been limited to four vessels each of 100 tons burden and with restricted armament and duties. In 1861 there were no British naval vessels upon the lakes, and had not been for many years. The United States had only one vessel, the *Michigan*, which had been cruising upon the upper lakes since 1844. The British Government had complained before in regard to the size of the *Michigan*, and the conditions of 1861 led to another complaint on August 31. Lord Lyons was instructed by the British Government to represent to the United States Government that the tonnage of the United States naval force on the lakes above Niagara Falls, and especially the armament of the steamer *Michigan*, seemed to be "in excess of the limit stipulated in the arrangement of 1817."<sup>2</sup> Mr. Seward in reply stated that the only naval force of the United States upon the upper lakes was

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<sup>1</sup> No. 8, Notes from State Department to British Legation, May 1, 1861.

<sup>2</sup> No. 42, Notes to State Department from British Legation.

the *Michigan*, of 582 tons, carrying one gun of 8 inches, and used "exclusively for purposes of recruiting the Navy, with artillery practice for the newly recruited seamen." Mr. Seward did not consider that the retention of the *Michigan* upon the lakes was any violation of the agreement of 1817, but expressed his willingness to consider any views which the British Government might have to the contrary.<sup>1</sup> There is no record at the State Department to show that there was ever any further objection to the *Michigan*. The fact that the United States had no other naval vessel on the lakes probably influenced the British Government to give a loose construction to the agreement of 1817 in regard to the size of the *Michigan*. The *New Orleans*, of 74 guns, which had remained unfinished at Sacketts Harbor since 1814, seems to have been reckoned in the navy list as an effective line-of-battle ship, but there was nothing to fear from it.<sup>2</sup>

It was doubtless the intention in Canada to preserve a strict neutrality. But the people of the United States were suspicious. Secretary Seward's circular of October 14 to the Northern governors spoke about the need of defenses for the lakes. In reply to this the Canadian papers said that fortifications on the north were a menace to Canada. The English papers doubted whether the convention which made the Great Lakes neutral would justify either England or the United States in erecting fortresses along their shores, and it was stated that such fortresses would only be standing menaces and could not answer the end desired.

On November 8 the *Trent* affair occurred, and was a new cause of alarm in regard to the relations between England and the United States, but it does not appear that the danger from Canada was great enough to require defensive preparations in that quarter. The Detroit Free Press said that there was no danger on the lakes, and that the merchant craft could be used for defense in case of hostilities. The Toronto Globe said that the act of Commodore Wilkes could not cause any apprehension of war between the two countries. Other Canadian papers went so far as to say that the weight of authority might be found to lie upon the side of Commodore Wilkes. There was a wide Northern sympathy in Canada at this time. The Detroit Free Press saw no danger upon the lakes. The comment of the London press and the demand of the British Government in December, however, seemed to forebode war, and each side

<sup>1</sup> No. 9, Notes from State Department to British Legation.

<sup>2</sup> London Times, January 7, 1862.



considered plans for the defense of the lakes. There was an impression in Canada that General Scott returned from France solely to give counsel as to an invasion of Canada, and there was at once a decreased sympathy for the Union cause.

In the midst of the general excitement statesmen were carried away by their feelings, but Lincoln and Seward, uninfluenced by passion and prejudice, surveyed calmly and decided wisely. The past policy of the country was continued and war was averted, but the rankling wound caused by the *Trent* affair was one that could not be healed at once.

England would have had immediate advantage in case war had broken out. She had "dug a canal from the foot of Lake Ontario, on a line parallel to the river, but beyond the reach of American guns from the opposite shore, to a point on the St. Lawrence below, beyond American jurisdiction, thus securing a safe channel to and from the lakes." She also had a canal around the Falls of Niagara. Thus she could in a short time convey light-draft gunboats from the ocean to the lakes, and threaten American commerce and lake cities. The House Military Committee, however, probably exaggerated the danger. Its report stated that the wealthy cities and immense commerce of the United States upon the lakes from Ogdensburg to Chicago was "as open to incursion as was Mexico when invaded by Cortez;" that light-draft gunboats could in one month shell every town and "at one blow sweep our commerce from that entire chain of waters." It went on to say:

Occupied by our vast commercial enterprises, and by violent party conflicts, our people failed to notice at the time that the safety of our entire northern frontier has been destroyed by the digging of two short canals. Near the head of the St. Lawrence, the British, to complete their supremacy on the lakes, have built a large naval depot for the construction and repair of vessels, and a very strong fort to protect the depot and the outlets of the lakes. \* \* \*

The result of all this is that in the absence of ships of war on the lakes, and of means to convey them there from the ocean, the United States, upon the breaking out of the war, would, without navy-yards and suitable docks, have to commence the building of a fleet upon Lake Ontario, and another upon the upper lakes. At the same time, England, possessing a naval depot at the entrance to this system of waters, can forestall us in all our attempts, both offensive and defensive.

But the British probably felt that the *ultimate* advantage in this quarter would rest with the United States. They did not desire to make the lakes the theater of any conflict which



might arise. Sir Francis Head said: "If Canadian vessels are attacked on fresh water, let the injury be promptly avenged by the British navy throughout the wide, rude, salt, aqueous surface of the globe." Mr. C. F. Adams thought that it was the discovery of the indefensible position of Canada which materially contributed to cool the ardor with which the discussion of the *Trent* affair had been entered into. Mr. W. H. Russell, an Englishman, who went to Canada just after the *Trent* affair to study the condition, said that the Canadian frontier was assailable at all points. The line of the Welland Canal was open and defenseless; Hamilton had no defenses; the defenses of Toronto were ludicrous; the Grand Trunk Railway was close to the shores of Lake Ontario, where communications could be easily cut; Lake Michigan gave the United States the advantage; New York alone was richer than the Canadas; England did not have as many light vessels as the United States; and Canada could not guard herself from invasion by preparing a navy in time of peace.

Nevertheless, the evident immediate advantage which the British had upon the lakes was the source, during the year 1862, of various discussions, resolutions, and reports concerning the northern frontier. The Ohio legislature passed resolutions in favor of a naval depot on Lake Erie to protect the country from danger or injury by an "armed enemy."<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant Totten had also recommended such a depot at some point on the Western lakes. The House committee (on Harbor Defenses on Lakes and Rivers) favored lake defenses. The "brilliant naval triumphs" upon the lakes in early days were held out to the "brethren of the East" in order to secure their votes for defenses.<sup>2</sup> The House Military Committee reported in favor of a ship canal from the Mississippi River to the lakes, in order to admit gunboats, though they did not think it wise to abrogate the agreement of 1817 at that time.<sup>3</sup> Reports upon a national armory in the West favored Pittsburg rather than Chicago, on the ground that it was near the lakes but not upon them. On April 23, Mr. Blair, of the Military Committee, reported in favor of military canals from the Mississippi to the lakes, and from the lakes to the Hudson, so that "one fleet would answer for two" in protecting the exposed northern

<sup>1</sup> House Mis. Doc. No. 45, Thirty-seventh Congress, second session, February 21, 1862.

<sup>2</sup> H. Rps. Com. No. 23, Thirty-seventh Congress, second session. Vol. 3, February 12, 1862.

<sup>3</sup> H. R. No. 37, Thirty-seventh Congress, second session. Vol. 3, February 20, 1862.

frontier.<sup>1</sup> On April 28 there was a report upon the feasibility of enlarging the Illinois and Michigan Canal, so gunboats could pass to Lake Michigan. It was believed by many that the agreement of 1817 did not apply to that lake. On June 3, Mr. Blair, of the Military Committee, reported upon the petitions for enlarging the locks of the Erie and Oswego canals so monitors could pass for the defense of the lakes.<sup>2</sup> To partially overcome the British advantage on the lakes, the New York senate also proposed to adapt the canals of the State to the defense of the Northwestern lakes.<sup>3</sup>

Back of all the petitions and reports upon ship canals is something besides the feeling of danger. It was the realities of Western commerce more than any imminent danger from northern attack which developed the plans for connecting the lakes with the Mississippi and the Atlantic by deep waterways. The ghost of British fleets upon the lakes was pushed into prominence in order to get the aid of the Government in digging canals. There was doubtless some cause for uneasiness in the rumors which were occasionally afloat,<sup>4</sup> and there was a considerable number of people in both countries who might have rushed into a conflict if they could have had their way; but there appears to have been a general conviction that the two countries would reach a mutual understanding.

During the first two years of the civil war when the Lower Mississippi was held by the Confederates, the Western products considerably increased the lake commerce. The Canadian canals even before were not of sufficient capacity to satisfy the needs of the American commerce. In addition to this, just after the *Trent* affair, there was considerable American sentiment in favor of canals on American soil. A select committee of Congress in March, 1863, thought that our Canadian neighbors had insulted us, and that we should not be compelled to use their canals.

In June, 1863, at a ship canal convention in Chicago, five thousand delegates were reported to be present. The Union arms had recently sustained serious defeats, and the Confederates were planning to carry the war north of the Potomac. The fear that this would secure the favor of England to the Confederate cause was increased. It was thought to be a

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<sup>1</sup> Reps. Com. No. 86, Thirty-seventh Congress, second session, Vol. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Reps. Com. No. 114, Thirty-seventh Congress, second session, Vol. 4.

<sup>3</sup> New York Senate Journal.

<sup>4</sup> Domestic Letters (S. D.), Vol. 68, October 8, 1862.

favorable time to secure the aid of the Government in constructing a waterway from the Mississippi to the lakes and from the lakes to the Atlantic. Nearly every speaker at the convention said that the lake commerce was in great danger. Many thought there should be a procession of ironclads from the Mississippi to Lake Michigan. Mr. Spalding of Ohio favored the Niagara Canal also, so the procession could pass on to Lake Ontario.

It is evident that the danger of war was much exaggerated. Vice-President Hamlin spoke of the military value of the canals, but he mentioned the commercial value also. Mr. Hubbel, of Wisconsin, said the canals were not a military necessity. He said that if England had desired war she would have made it in 1862, "when the South had us by the throat," and that there was now no danger of war with her "except by our own volition." Mr. D. B. Ruggles of New York talked of the "glorious West as a gigantic hogpen." With the cooperation of the hog and the canals vast amounts of corn could be taken to the sea. The hog could eat the corn and Europe would eat the hog.

The convention passed resolutions declaring the construction and enlargement of canals between the Mississippi River and the Atlantic and connecting with the lakes as of great military and commercial importance. It was stated that such canals were "demanded alike by military prudence, political wisdom, and the necessities of commerce;" that they would "furnish the cheapest and most expeditious means of protecting the northern frontier," and at the same time "promote the rapid development and permanent union of the whole country."

The energy and resources of the country were taxed to the utmost at this time, and these schemes were not adopted by the Government, though they were proposed in the Thirty-eighth Congress several times in the early part of 1864.

By July 4, 1863, the tide of the civil war had clearly turned in favor of the Union cause. Vicksburg had fallen and in a few days the Mississippi was entirely wrested from the hands of the Confederates. Gettysburg had also helped to decide the issue of the war. The invasion by the gallant Lee was repelled. It was considered an auspicious time for the Government of the United States to speak in a more decided tone against the attitude of the British Government toward the Confederates. It apprehended a crisis in case of the probable failure of all

the "friendly appeals to Her Majesty's Government against suffering a deeply concerted and rapidly preparing naval war to be waged against the United States from British ports in Europe and America by British subjects in British built and armed vessels."<sup>1</sup> Mr. Seward, on July 11, when he felt the danger of an approaching naval conflict with Great Britain, in his instructions to Mr. Adams, used some expressions which were afterwards incorporated into the President's message and were considered by the British Government to be "disrespectful and menacing." The President in the following March allowed any expressions to be withdrawn which Lord Russell should consider exceptional, though it was asserted that their object had been "to remove out of the way a stumbling block of national offense," and not to offend or provoke war.

Events which occurred after his letter of July 11, 1863, "such as the intended invasion of Johnsons Island from Canada \* \* \* and especially the report of Malling, the pretended secretary of the navy of the insurgents," caused Mr. Seward to feel that the trouble which he apprehended "was not over-estimated nor too soon anticipated."

In the early part of November, 1863, the Governor-General of Canada notified Lord Lyons at Washington that there was rumor of a plot of the Confederates in Canada to secure steamers on Lake Erie, release the prisoners at Johnsons Island, and then invade the United States by an attack upon Buffalo.<sup>2</sup> Lord Lyons at a late hour on the night of November 11, promptly notified Mr. Seward so that measures could be taken to watch lake steamers. General Dix was at once sent to the frontier and Hon. Preston King was sent to confer upon the subject with Lord Monck, so that there might be perfect understanding between the authorities of Canada and the United States. The *Michigan* anchored off Johnsons Island to prevent any expedition against that place, but Lord Monck's warning had already prevented the execution of the plot at that time.

At the beginning of 1864 there was much anxiety concerning the operation of Confederate agents along the northern border of the United States. Suspicious vessels were reported to be seen in Canadian waters. They were supposed to be there for

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. No. 19. "Instructions" (S. D.), March 2, 1864

<sup>2</sup> Correspondence Relating to Fenian Invasion and the Rebellion of the Southern States. Ottawa, 1869.



the purpose of making piratical attacks upon the lake trade of the United States. The *Montreal* was reported to be armed with 24 guns, small arms, cutlasses, and boarding pikes. The *Saratoga* was also reported as a hostile vessel. Lord Lyons notified Lord Monck of the reports concerning these vessels, and he at once took steps to detain them if the report proved to be true. The large number of Confederates in Canada at this time caused Lord Monck to have fears that there would be great danger of having the neutrality of the Canadian territory compromised during the following season, and this consideration caused him to think that there ought to be some British naval force stationed on the lakes to enforce the commercial police. On March 19 he wrote to the Duke of Newcastle that the agreement of 1817 prohibited the United States from a naval force competent to protect her commerce from piratical attempts at that time, and that Great Britain was "bound to take stringent precautions that her harbors shall not be used for the preparation of expeditions hostile to the trade of the United States against which the stipulations of a treaty prevents that power from making adequate provision for her defense." Lord Monck's ideas were not clear in regard to the agreement of 1817. He thought it limited both parties to "one vessel on Lake Ontario and two on each of the other lakes." He was also under the false impression that the prohibition had been "imposed on the United States" in the interests of Great Britain. He suggested that five vessels small enough to pass through the Canadian canals should be sent out—one for Lake Ontario and two for each of the lakes Erie and Huron.<sup>1</sup>

Lord Monck sent a confidential agent to investigate the various reports concerning Confederate vessels, and he reported to Lord Russell, on March 31, that no evidence was found. Neither the *Montreal* nor the *Saratoga* could be discovered. But he was still of the opinion that it would be "most advisable to have some vessels bearing Her Majesty's flag on the lakes." There was no royal navy on the lakes, and he thought this might hold out some inducement to piratical attempts. Even rumors produced a feeling of unrest on the part of those interested in the lake trade of the United States "which might easily be exaggerated into a sentiment of hos-

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence Relating to Fenian Invasion and the Rebellion of the Southern States, p. 61.

tility toward the Canadians, from whose harbors they imagine an attack on their commerce might issue." Lord Monck thought the evil effects of rumors could be stopped if it were known that one British vessel was stationed on each of the lakes Ontario, Erie, and Huron. Mr. Cardwell, who soon took the place of the Duke of Newcastle at the home office, promised to address Lord Monck later concerning the small naval vessels which were to be kept within the limits of the agreement of 1817, but no vessels were ever sent.

The reports of Confederate organizations in Canada probably had some influence in causing the United States to begin the building of cutters for the lake revenue service. A side-screw cutter was begun at Lower Black Rock, near Buffalo, in the early part of April, and was expected to be ready in three months. Lord Lyons saw a newspaper statement concerning the new vessel and asked Mr. Seward whether it would contravene the conditions of 1817.<sup>1</sup> The latter made inquiry of the Secretary of the Treasury, and on May 11 he wrote Lord Lyons that it appeared that the vessel would form "no part of the naval force of the United States," but was intended exclusively for the prevention of smuggling.<sup>2</sup>

But the idea of making these revenue vessels available for defense in case of an emergency was probably considered, though there was no intention of violating the stipulation of 1817. On May 5 Secretary Chase, of the Treasury, wrote Secretary Seward as follows:

I have the honor to call your attention to the arrangement of April, 1817, between the United States and Great Britain (U. S. Stat. at Large, vol. 8, p. 231) relative to the naval force to be maintained upon the American lakes, and to inquire whether the provision of the arrangement which restricts the naval force of the two Governments to two vessels on the upper lakes is construed by the Department of State to embrace Lake Erie as among the lakes referred to; also whether it is within the scope of the arrangement to restrict the armament and tonnage of vessels designed exclusively for the revenue service.

On May 7 Mr. Seward replied:

I have the honor to state that, in my opinion, Lake Erie may be considered as one of the upper lakes referred to in that instrument. I am not, however, prepared to acknowledge that its purpose was to restrict the armament or tonnage of vessels designed exclusively for the revenue service.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Buffalo Morning Courier, April 15, 1864.

<sup>2</sup> No. 11, Notes from the State Department to the British Legation.

<sup>3</sup> Domestic Letters (S. D.), vol. 64, p. 228.



The United States Government desired to live up to the spirit of the agreement of 1817, although there was a feeling in Congress that it was unequal, under the changes which had occurred since its inception. It was believed that England was too passive in her policy concerning the civil war in the United States<sup>1</sup> and that she should have followed the advice of those English statesmen who advocated a more liberal policy toward the United States Government. Notwithstanding the avowed intention of the British Government to preserve a strict neutrality, the Confederates managed to get the materials of war from English ports. The Union cause doubtless received assistance in the same way, but this did not prevent the widespread belief that the Confederates were receiving assistance that could have been prevented.

The uneasiness regarding the Confederates in Canada continued. Lord Monck was kept busy investigating reports concerning them.<sup>2</sup> He asked the authorities to adopt every precaution to prevent the Confederates from making Canada a base for hostility against the Northern States. But notwithstanding the diligence of authority it was still possible for the Confederates to find their way into Canada and secretly plot to break the peace between Canada and the United States. Relations with Great Britain were also made more complicated by the Canadian Canal policy, which was not considered to be liberal enough to justify the United States in continuing the reciprocity treaty.

On May 25 Mr. Spalding, in the House, passed from a discussion of the inequalities of the reciprocity treaty to consider the agreement of 1817, "whereby," he said, "the northwestern lakes, with a population of ten millions of people upon their American borders, and upon whose bosom floats one-third part of the whole commercial wealth of our country, were placed at the tender mercies of Great Britain."<sup>3</sup> \* \* \*

He complained that the United States Government was afraid it would offend England to place a naval depot or navy-yard upon the American coast of one of the lakes, though Great Britain had been allowed quietly to dig canals by which they could pass gunboats from Quebec to Chicago to "devastate our fairest cities and destroy our richest commerce."

<sup>1</sup> No. 86, Dispatches from Mr. Adams, May 19, 1864.

<sup>2</sup> Nos. 64 and 65, Notes from the State Department to the British Legation.

<sup>3</sup> Congressional Globe, vol. 58, Thirty-eighth Congress, first session, p. 2481.

Mr. Spalding said that by their canals the British had "defeated the only object that led us into the arrangement." Mr. Washburne thought that if the Government would enlarge the Illinois and Michigan canals in his State that the United States would also be able to send gunboats into the lakes. Mr. Pruyn of New York said the United States could build gunboats on Lake Michigan, but Mr. Spalding informed him that the head of the Navy Department said that this lake was also included under the agreement of 1817. Mr. Arnold said there were 100 vessels of war on the Mississippi which could be taken to the lakes, and he favored the canals rather than the abrogation of treaties. Mr. Spalding was tuned up to a higher key. He had a constituent who controlled fourteen steam propellers from Chicago to Ogdensburg, all of which could within a week be made into gunboats if there had only been a navy-yard on the lakes. Mr. Spalding was not satisfied with the decision of the Navy Department and he was at the time in favor of making a clean sweep of treaties. "I hope," he said, "when we get our hands once in we will make clean work."

On account of the objections which had been made to establishing a naval depot upon the lakes, Mr. Spalding, on June 13, introduced a joint resolution for the termination of the agreement of 1817. On June 18 it passed the House in the following form:

Whereas the treaty of eighteen hundred and seventeen, as to the naval force upon the lakes, was designed as a temporary arrangement only, and, although equal and just at the time it was made, has become greatly unequal through the construction [by] Great Britain of sundry ship canals; and whereas the vast interests of commerce upon the Northwestern lakes and the security of cities and towns situated on their American borders, manifestly require the establishment of one or more navy-yards wherein ships may be fitted and prepared for naval warfare;

And whereas the United States Government, unlike that of Great Britain, is destitute of ship canals for the transmission of gunboats from the Atlantic Ocean to the Western lakes:

*Be it resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the President of the United States be, and is hereby, authorized and directed to give notice to the Government of Great Britain that it is the wish and intention of the Government of the United States to terminate said arrangement of eighteen hundred and seventeen, in respect to the naval force upon the lakes, at the end of six months from and after the giving of said notice.*

This resolution was not considered in the Senate, but on August 4 Lord Lyons wrote Mr. Seward that the attention of

his Government had been drawn to the resolution and would view with regret and alarm the abrogation of an arrangement which for fifty years prevented occasions for disagreement, as well as needless expense and inconvenience. Mr. Seward replied that there was "at present no intention to abrogate the arrangement," and that timely notice would be given in case the Government should favor its abrogation.

But letters and telegrams continued to announce that the Confederates were negotiating for the purchase of boats on the lakes. In July there were reports that they had machines which were to be mounted on vessels and that they intended to destroy the cities on the lakes.<sup>1</sup> Such reports induced the United States Government to place a restriction upon the export of materials from New York to the British colonies.

An affair on Lake Erie September 19 brought matters to a crisis. The steamboat *Philo Parsons* left Detroit for Sandusky, taking passengers with supposed baggage at Sandwich and Amherstburg. They proved to be Confederates, and after leaving Kellys Island they took charge of the vessel. They intended to cooperate with another force designed to capture the armed steamer *Michigan* at Sandusky, to release rebel prisoners at Camp Johnson, near Sandusky, and then to commit depredation on the lake cities. Design on the *Michigan* having failed, the *Parsons* was brought back to the Detroit River and left at Sandwich in a sinking condition. During the raid some other captures were made of United States soldiers and of the steamer *Island Queen*.<sup>2</sup>

The news that the Confederate flag had been unfurled upon the lakes created much excitement along the frontier. Major-General Hitchcock of Sandusky advised "that no time be lost in putting afloat armed vessels upon Lake Ontario and speedily upon the other lakes also." On September 26 Mr. F. W. Seward notified Mr. Burnley, of the British legation at Washington, that, owing to the recent proceedings on the lakes, it was found necessary to increase the "observing force" temporarily in that quarter. The steam propeller *Hector* was chartered at Oswego, N. Y., for revenue-cutter service. The *Winslow* had been chartered at Buffalo a few days before.

The United States Government felt that it was only acting in self-defense in meeting conditions which "could scarcely have been anticipated" in 1817.

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence Relative to Fenians and the Rebellion of Southern States, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Detroit Free Press, September 21, 1864.

Mr. Seward had just prepared a statement of the outrage upon Lake Erie, when the news arrived that a band of twenty-five desperate men had on October 19 attacked St. Albans, Vt., robbed its banks and boarding houses and escaped upon stolen horses to Canada, where they were arrested by the municipal authorities.

Mr. Seward discussed these matters in a friendly spirit with Mr. Burnley; wrote Mr. Adams at London to give Earl Russell notice that after six months the United States would "deem themselves at liberty to increase the naval armament upon the lakes, if, in their judgment, the condition of affairs should require it." He said that such events required prompt and decisive proceedings on the part of the British Government, "in order to prevent the danger of ultimate conflict upon the Canadian borders."

The excitement produced by the St. Albans affair was fed both by the natural course of events and by artificial means. It was felt that Canada was responsible for the good conduct of her Confederate guests,<sup>1</sup> and that their bad conduct might produce a danger of war with Canada. It produced no better feeling in the United States when Lieut. Bennett H. Young, commander of the St. Albans raiders, declared that he went to Vermont as a commissioned officer in the provisional army of the Confederate States, and that he had violated no law of Canada.<sup>2</sup> False reports continued to alarm the people and to add to the excitement which naturally existed upon the eve of a great Presidential election. On Sunday, October 30, the American consul at Toronto telegraphed the mayor of Detroit that 100 men armed to the teeth and loaded with combustibles had left Toronto to raid Detroit.<sup>3</sup> The congregations at Detroit were dismissed, bells rang, rumors floated, crowds met and had to be dispersed by the mayor. The hundred men never arrived, but on November 2 a telegram from Washington announced that the State Department had information that there was a conspiracy to fire all the principal cities in the North on the election day. The Free Press had ceased to place much reliance in such reports, but they had the tendency to keep up an unhealthy excitement along the border. Some, guided entirely by emotion and passion, would have been glad if a disruption of peaceful relations between the United States

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<sup>1</sup> Detroit Free Press, October 27, 1864.

<sup>2</sup> Toronto Leader, October 28, 1864.

<sup>3</sup> Toronto Leader, November 4, 1864; also Detroit Free Press, October 31.



and Canada could have been brought about.<sup>1</sup> The war had given a great impetus to the Fenian organization, and there were many Fenians in the Federal Army who would have welcomed an opportunity to invade Canada. Then there were others who, speaking for political effect or personal influence, favored "the next war." A colonel at St. Louis said that "God Almighty had established boundaries for the great Republic bounded on all sides by oceans and peninsulas," and that Canada would become a part.

Canadian authorities appear to have done all they could to preserve neutrality, but the tone of some American newspapers gave them offense. Governor Monck took offense at the Dix order to an officer at Burlington after the St. Albans affair, which spoke of pursuing the offenders across the boundary. Seward wrote Lord Lyons on November 3 that "Indignant complaints by newspapers, \* \* \* as well as hasty popular proceedings for self defense and retaliation, are among the consequences which must be expected to occur when unprovoked aggressions from Canada no longer allow our citizens to navigate the intervening waters with safety, or rest at home with confidence of security."<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Seward found no fault with the authorities in Canada, but he felt that the two Governments should agree upon some more effective measures to preserve the peace. He saw that the provocations against the people along the line of border might lead to intrusions from the American side of the lakes. He remembered the border troubles of 1838, and the excitement at the time of the McLeod trial in 1841. Political agitation had existed in Canada as well as in the United States, and in order to prevent future civil strife, he was inclined to think that it would be "wise to establish a proper system of repression now which would prove a rock of safety for both countries hereafter."<sup>3</sup>

On the day of the November election, General Butler and Gen. J. R. Hawley, with 7,000 men, as a precautionary measure, were placed upon lake steamers ready for service at any point in case Confederates or Confederate sympathizers should attempt any of the reported plots. Nothing occurred to make their service necessary.

<sup>1</sup> Dix to Stanton, November 22, 1864. Correspondence Relative to Fenians, etc., p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> No. 12, Notes from State Department to British Legation, p. 346.

<sup>3</sup> No. 19, Instructions to Adams, October 24, 1864; No. 88, Dispatches from Mr. Adams, November 25, 1864.

Reports of plots continued, though it was evident that they had depreciated in value. Reported Confederate vessels were searched for, but could not be found. Commander Carter of the *Michigan* thought that rumors were issued merely to scare the people on the lakes.<sup>1</sup> Major-General Hooker, in a telegram to Mayor Fargo of Buffalo, complained of receiving so little that was reliable, and became skeptical as to the accuracy of information.<sup>2</sup>

Still there was reason for vigilance, for since the people had so strongly supported the Lincoln Administration at the polls, the Confederates saw the approaching doom of their cause, and in order to give themselves a chance to get new breath they were industrious in their efforts to involve the United States in foreign difficulties. Major-General Dix heard of "rebels drilling north of Lake Ontario," and also saw "indications of retaliation" on the part of American citizens. Thoughts of war with England had become familiar. People complained that the privateers which swept the American commerce from the seas were English-built and English-manned.<sup>3</sup> Detroit believed that further raids were being planned in Canada, and petitioned Congress for "stanch and strong vessels" to protect the cities and shipping of the lakes.<sup>4</sup>

There was increase of feeling south of the lakes, both natural and artificial, when Congress met in December. Action at Washington was prompt and energetic. Mr. Seward asked the Secretary of the Navy and the Secretary of the Treasury if they desired legislation for additional naval armament upon the lakes.<sup>5</sup> The Secretary of the Navy thought that since the notice had been given to terminate the agreement of 1817, it would be well to have two or three additional vessels upon the lakes, though he had not yet submitted estimates for extra expenditures in that quarter.<sup>6</sup> Senator Sherman introduced a bill for six new revenue cutters. He had been out in Ohio when the *Philo Parsons* was captured, and he decided to prevent such another "close shave" for the lake traffic. The two steamers which had been chartered in September "to prevent smuggling" were no longer in the Gov-

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<sup>1</sup> Misc. Letters (S. D.), November 16, 1864.

<sup>2</sup> Buffalo Courier, November 16, 1864.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Lecture of Goldwin Smith at Boston December, 1864.

<sup>4</sup> Senate Doc. No. 2, Thirty-eighth Congress, second session, vol. 1, December 8, 1864.

<sup>5</sup> Domestic Letters (S. D.), vol. 67, December 9.

<sup>6</sup> Misc. Letters (S. D.), December 14.



ernment service. It was felt that in order to guard the long lake coast vigilance was required. It was understood that the cutters were to be armed with a small pivot gun. This was not supposed to be in violation of existing treaties.

Passion was aroused on December 14 by the news that the Canada courts had released the St. Albans raiders. Senator Chandler of Michigan proposed in Congress that troops be sent to defend the northern frontier from raids from Canada.<sup>1</sup> On December 15 the House passed a bill to terminate the reciprocity treaty. Senator Sumner also called for information concerning the agreement of 1817, with a view of terminating it by proper legislation. The State Department issued an order requiring that all travelers from Canada to the United States, except immigrants, should obtain passports from the United States consuls. On December 19, in discussing a bill for the defense of the northern frontier, Senator Howard of Michigan said that the "lion must show his teeth on this side the border in order to preserve the peace," and to prevent Canada from being a place of refuge for the Confederates.<sup>2</sup> Senator Sherman referred to the inequalities of the agreement of 1817, and said that Congress should give the President power to place a necessary force upon the lakes. Senator Sumner spoke of the agreement of 1817 as an "anomalous, abnormal, \* \* \* small type arrangement" whose origin, and history, and character were still subjects of doubt, and thought the Senate could easily abrogate it if necessary. Mr. Farwell said there was no need for alarm; that the United States, in case of war, could easily get control of the lakes at any time by converting steamers into war vessels. Mr. Grimes said Great Britain had no vessels which could pass to the lakes.

There was anxiety all along the border. Conservative newspapers admitted that there was danger of a crisis. The Detroit Free Press said: "We are drifting into a war with England," and favored nonintercourse with Canada until Canada could enact proper neutrality laws. Detroit and other lake cities began to urge the advantage of their location as a site for a naval depot. The Toronto Leader began to philosophize upon how much of the savage still remained in man to prevent mutual disarmament from leading to lasting results. The

<sup>1</sup>Senate Mis. Doc. No. 5, Thirty-eighth Congress, second session, vol. 8.

<sup>2</sup>Congressional Globe, Thirty-eighth Congress, second session, part 1, p. 57.

attitude of the American Government seemed to indicate that the United States would have a lake fleet by April, and the *Leader* began to advocate the enlargement of the Canadian canals so British vessels could be taken into the lakes. It was stated that the Americans had not observed the spirit of the agreement of 1817 for three years.<sup>1</sup> As the year closed it was reported that 50,000 Fenians were ready to march upon Canada at a day's notice.

While Congress had been showing its teeth by energetic action, the news of preparations for incursions of Confederates from Canada had not ceased, but the border feeling was gradually becoming more quiet. After the Dix order was revoked, Mr. Burnley thought all would get along smoothly if the public could be kept from getting too "rampageous." It soon became evident that the naval depot which Wisconsin wanted at Milwaukee would not be needed. The agreement of 1817 was finally abrogated by Congress in February, but the scare upon the lakes was already over, and it does not appear that there was any intention of placing a naval establishment there. When the subject was under discussion in the House, on January 18, Mr. Farwell and others thought that useless vessels upon the lakes were "more likely to involve us in trouble with Great Britain than to do us any good;" and though they voted to ratify the notice previously given by the State Department for abrogation of the agreement of 1817, they hoped that the President would at an early date institute proceedings or a commission with Great Britain to renew the arrangement.<sup>2</sup>

The need of war vessels on the lakes was still urged by some, especially by those who hoped to induce the United States Government to engage in building ship canals to join the lakes with the Mississippi. One member<sup>3</sup> said in Congress that the United States had \$50,000,000 invested in war steamers on the Mississippi, and that for one-tenth that amount a canal could be dug so they might be taken to the lakes for preservation in fresh water. There were still others who said that "the 2,000 ships bearing the teeming productions of the West upon the bosom of the lakes" required more than one war ship for their protection. There was probably some reason for this statement, for it appears that Great Britain, alarmed by the pro-

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<sup>1</sup> *Toronto Leader*, December 23, 1864.

<sup>2</sup> *Congressional Globe*, Thirty eighth Congress, second session, part 1, p. 311.

<sup>3</sup> *Congressional Globe*, February 1, 1865.

ceedings in Congress, was preparing to send guns "to arm new naval forces on the lakes." The policy of the British Parliament was uncertain.

But public sentiment for the Confederacy began to decrease in England. After the news of the storming of Fort Fisher and the closing of navigation to Wilmington, the friends of the United States Government gained at London.<sup>1</sup> The aspect in Canada had become peaceful. At the recommendation of the Government of Great Britain, Canada passed an act on February 6 to repress outrages in violation of peace on the frontier.<sup>2</sup> The London Times began to alter its tone. Lord Russell spoke in a better spirit. Conferences with Mr. Adams were more friendly. Mason, Slidell, and Mann, the Confederate agents in Europe, were notified that such practice as had been going on from Canada and acknowledged by President Davis as belligerent operations must cease.<sup>3</sup> Canadian papers stated that measures would be taken to prevent the danger of a war in which the Confederates were trying to involve us.<sup>4</sup>

Still there was at this time an undercurrent of much restlessness and distrust in England on account of the fear of large impending claims, and of an American war for the conquest of Canada after domestic reconciliation had been secured. The disposition of Congress to terminate treaties nourished a feeling that the United States was unfriendly to England. In the House of Commons Lord Palmerston endeavored to calm the fears that there was an indication of intended hostilities on the part of the United States,<sup>5</sup> but the alarm policy did not die away for some time. On February 20, when the defenses of Canada were being considered in the House of Lords, there was much talk of the contest of the North for empire and the need of counter preparations on the lakes to balance those made by the United States, which it was stated were in violation of treaty stipulations.

It was evident that something should be done to combat this feeling. Lord Russell suggested that it was time to think of something to take the place of the agreement of 1817 before it was terminated by the notice already given. Mr. Adams

<sup>1</sup> No. 88, Dispatches from Mr. Adams, February 2, 1865.

<sup>2</sup> Canada Gazette, February 6, 1865.

<sup>3</sup> No. 88, Dispatches from Mr. Adams, February 2, 1865. (Inclosure.)

<sup>4</sup> Toronto Globe, January 24, 1865.

<sup>5</sup> Parliamentary Debates, vol. 177, p. 144 (February 10). London Times, February 11, 1865.

agreed that armaments were expensive, useless, and breeders of suspicion; and he saw no reason for not continuing the treaties since the active effort of the Canadian authorities.<sup>1</sup>

On March 8 Mr. Seward announced that the United States had decided to abide by the agreement of 1817. The passport system for Canada was also to cease at once. In accepting the farewell of Lord Lyons on March 20, Mr. Seward said: "I have no doubt that when this dreadful war is ended the United States and Great Britain will be reconciled and become better friends than ever."

Before the news that the United States Government desired to continue the agreement of 1817 had reached London (officially), there had been two debates in the House of Commons, on March 13 and 23, in regard to relations with the United States and vessels for the lakes. Evidently the alarmist policy was on the decline. The majority of the members spoke in a tone of moderation in regard to Canadian defenses. Both Lord Palmerston and Lord Russell said that the United States was justified in its action regarding the lakes, and they did not think that the action of Congress was hostile.

The news that the United States would abide by the agreement of 1817 and that the passport system on the Canadian border had been abandoned created a good effect both in England and in Canada. There was even well-grounded hope for a new reciprocity treaty. Mr. Cardwell, the colonial secretary, soon after announced the decision of the London Government to abide by the arrangement of 1817. Gradually members of Parliament turned from fortifications and began to advocate plans for encouraging the settlement of Canada. But the prodigious development of physical power in the United States continued for some time to be a source of some alarm both in Canada and England. The Slave Confederacy was in its death struggle, and there was fear that idle soldiers would threaten Canada. In Canada the danger from the United States was used as an argument in favor of the Intercolonial Railway and the confederation of the British provinces.<sup>2</sup> Members of Parliament felt that the continuance of the bond with Canada depended partly upon the good will of the United States, and they were not so sure that the American policy of extension was not one of conquest. They sometimes mistook the momentary utterances of swaggering officers and demagogues for the

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<sup>1</sup> No. 88, Dispatches of Mr. Adams, No. 884, February 23, 1865.

<sup>2</sup> Can. Prov. Parlia. Debates on Confed., 8th P. P., 3d sess.



abiding will of the great American people. Territorial aggrandizement had never been the passion of the North.

It is doubtless true that at the close of the civil war many in the United States thought that in a few years Canada would be constrained, for commercial reasons, to knock for admission into the American Union, but it would have been a departure from the American policy to annex Canada by force. In the heat of excitement the press often assumed a threatening tone, and "colonels," for effect, referred to the boundaries which "God Almighty had established, reaching to the Aurora Borealis on the north." Fenians organized to carry the green flag into Canada, and a Congressman moved to grant them the rights of belligerents. But if the Government may be said to have had any policy in regard to Canada, it was certainly not one of forcible incorporation. It may well be said of Seward that "he was faithful" to his duty, and the disbanding of vast armies at the close of the civil war, leaving irritating differences with England to be settled by diplomacy, was a triumph of the American principle.

The CHAIRMAN. There are five minutes before the necessary adjournment of this morning's session, and we happen to have with us the Federal general who commanded on the lake frontier at that time, and I would ask him to make a few words of comment on the paper to which we have listened. I present to you General Carrington.

#### REMARKS OF GEN. H. B. CARRINGTON.

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen: No episode of our civil war was so intense, so desperate, so organized, and for the time being threatened such utter ruin as the episode connected with this northern frontier matter. It was my province to command that department, and every paper referred to here has passed through my hands, and most of them are at my house in Boston. I have felt for several years a hesitancy whether to destroy or not papers associating the names of very eminent men at the North with the attempt to destroy the Union. I have at my house a United States Senator's letter, with his frank, in which he agrees to furnish 25,000 Garibaldi rifles. I have another letter from a member of the House, in which he agreed that 100,000 men should be organized for the Northwest confederacy. I had at Camp Douglas 7,000, at Camp Morton 9,000, and at Camp Chase 6,800 prisoners of war, and at Johnston's

Island 3,800, and the whole State was honeycombed with orders—the Knights of the Golden Circle, for instance. There were 87,000 members in Indiana and 70,000 in Illinois. People came over from Canada and got the bounty of \$500 or \$600 or \$700. They went to Louisville, jumped, and went back. On one single day I had to shoot three, after court-martial, who had come from Canada and enlisted and deserted three times, with their money. The hot-bed of this was Windsor. Vallandigham went from Dayton, Ohio, and established his headquarters there. It so happened that detectives were enabled to steam letters at midnight and give me the letters, and then they took the reply and steamed that, so I had a copy on both sides before the persons to whom they were addressed received them. Chief Justice Bullitt, of the State of Indiana, was one, and it became necessary to send him for a country residence to the Dry Tortugas. I was compelled to send to Rosecrans to get soldiers to guard Camp Morton. They had nearly tunneled out. They used pieces of wood, and their shoes were cut up into strings to assist them in getting out. It resulted in the arrest of five and their sentence to death. Their gallows—five of them—were painted black, and at night there came a telegram from Lincoln to commute the sentence to imprisonment for life. Afterwards there was a writ of error to the Supreme Court, and it was held that a military commission could not try them while the United States courts were open. There was that underlying element, which was very intense. One man came and enlisted, and in his pantaloons was found that which showed him to be a spy from Kirby Smith. His own company asked permission to shoot him. Generally in those military executions lots are drawn. Part of the guns have ball cartridges and part blank. But this company came forward with a unanimous signature requesting that each man might load, and they shot him all to pieces. He had gone out and was taken prisoner. One of my staff had paid him his bounty. The money was taken over into the other line, and that man turned traitor, pretended to be steward for his regiment, and he had over \$3,000 of that money with him and Kirby Smith's safe conduct. No wonder his own company were glad to execute him. That was the condition in Indiana. On the last day of December, 1862, the chief justice of Indiana, Chief Justice Perkins, had ordered the arrest of one of my staff officers, Captain Osborne, because he had arrested a private



soldier. We had forty-two forcible rescues that year. I was obliged to send a regiment to Charleston, in Illinois, and take the judge from the bench. He had just charged the jury, and he called an army officer a kidnaper because he arrested a deserter. Chief Justice Perkins said this: "I send the sheriff to execute the writ and arrest Captain Osborne." I was in the court-room and I said to him: "He belongs to the United States Army. He is on Government duty." Said he: "I should say, perhaps, the officer himself in command is not exempt from arrest. If that man Abraham Lincoln, called President, to-morrow issues the proclamation that he pretends he will, I declare Indiana out of the Union, and we will take care of ourselves." Captain Biddle, now of the Seventh Cavalry, who was then on my staff, was standing at the door. He left the room. The court did not order the commanding general arrested. It was not more than ten minutes before the drums were beating and two regiments were surrounding that court-house, and the supreme court was notified that they need have nothing to do for a few days, that the court-room would be occupied by the United States troops. There were 176 murders, assassinations of soldiers, and all the time a plot, of which we had knowledge, to burn our Northern cities; and five boxes were brought into Detroit, delivered over, and burned, of clothing that came from the yellow fever infected district in the West Indies. That was the character of the constant struggle day by day. Finally, at the request of General Sherman for laborers, I took two gangs, each of 40, of these people, instead of court-martialing them, chained their hands together, and, with colored musicians playing the *Rouge's March* through the town, put 40 in one car and 40 in another, and when they went down there Sherman set them to digging.

This is a little episode. It would take a long time to tell it, but it is a thrilling experience. But it was not the Confederates of the South who were doing this so much as the traitors at home, the politicians at home, the men who were trying to start the Northwestern confederacy and had a constitution drafted. I have kept silent about names, because there are men, perhaps as old as myself and perhaps a little older, still living, but I did want in connection with this paper to show that there was a terrible undergrowth of defiance of the Government at home, at the North, and that it was threatening us with absolute destruction. [Applause.]





